

The 19th Annual Pawtucket Arts Festival Kicks Off This September



A scene from last year's festival; photo credit: Keith E. Fayan

The city of Pawtucket presents what is arguably its most exciting event of the year each September: The Pawtucket Arts Festival. This event seeks to celebrate the creative and cultural community embedded in the city and surrounding region. The festival showcases art, music, theater, crafts, film and so much more while representing some of the best offerings found in the historic Blackstone River Valley. Jennifer Dalton Vincent, who is festival director for the first time this year said, "I'm really excited about the spirit of collaboration that has brought this huge month-long celebration of arts and culture together again this year. The festival would not come into being if it were not for so many committed, passionate individuals in the community — both people who run cultural organizations and people who volunteer their time to those organizations and the festival. That's been very exciting for me to bear witness to."

This local festival was originally created to recognize the beauty of Slater Park and celebrate the creative community of the city. What began as a handful of events centered around the park has blossomed into a month-long festival with upward of 30 unique and fabulous events scattered across the city. While the festival continues to evolve, the core mission of ensuring a place for the arts in Pawtucket has remained.

The events are particularly exciting this year. The festival kick-off includes an opening night celebration titled "Curtain Up" on September 8 at REVEL Factory. The festival's main annual fundraiser, this event will showcase live statues, jazz music, artisanal cocktails, light refreshments and more. While the festival offers events that are free to the public, this exciting evening of entertainment helps ensure the financial security of the rest of the festival. Tickets can be purchased online at [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).

The event that Jennifer Dalton Vincent is most excited for is the Slater Park Fall Festival slated for September 9 - 10. "This year we're so happy to be featuring a broader array of performers from a larger spectrum of cultural and artistic backgrounds. The Slater Park Fall Festival is a dynamic event that really well represents the cultural profile of Pawtucket."

This free weekend of activities will include a performance of the RI Philharmonic Pops in the Park, music and dance performances, an arts and crafts marketplace, fireworks and food trucks and many additional features. "It really showcases the best of what the festival has done in the past. And we're proud to recognize what's new."

The Slater Park Fall Festival allows festival-goers to experience art in a variety of ways. "We've planned it so people can engage with different modes of performance and art making." A community art project will take place, RI Black Storytellers will perform and lead participants through a puppet making project and art will meet science in a public art piece by New House. "They created a giant inflatable dome structure that you can walk inside. The outside looks like a honeycomb, and each opening is a camera obscura that reflects upside down images onto the inside of the dome. It really showcases this great space between art and science."

And participation isn't the only way festival organizers are making accessibility a major component of the events. "We teamed up with Blackstone Valley Tourism council to organize a shuttle to help bring people to activities happening at Taiwan Day and Slater Park Fall Festival. We're working to make it easier for people to get to both events, particularly people who may not have access to private transportation."

In addition to the Slater Park Fall Festival, Vincent is excited about an art installation that can be found along Pawtucket's riverfront district. **Keri King** is a Providence artist who works with wheat paste and paper to adhere paper art pieces to the sides of buildings. "She researched Pawtucket's archives and created a cast of characters that represent Pawtucket's creative and cultural history." So when you're strolling through Pawtucket, take a look at some of the downtown buildings and you might see some of her characters strolling along with you. "Our hope is to add a little whimsy and delight into that area."

The Pawtucket Arts Festival would not be possible without the dozens of sponsors including, but not limited to the City of Pawtucket, Pawtucket Teachers Alliance, Bristol County Savings Bank, and Pawtucket Times. For more information on the festival and a full schedule of events, go to pawtucketartsfestival.org.